DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 273 FL 020 043

AUTHOR Schroder, Hartmut
TITLE How To Avoid Ethnocentricity and Stereotypes in Analysing Another Culture.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 21p.; In: Communication and Discourse across Cultures and Languages. AFinLa Yearbook 1991; see FL 020 041.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Applied Linguistics; *Business Communication; Cross Cultural Studies; *Cultural Awareness; *Ethnocentrism; Finnish; Foreign Countries; *Intercultural Communication; Mass Media; *Stereotypes; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS Finland; Germany

ABSTRACT

Methodological problems caused by an ethnocentric view in analyzing another culture are discussed along with some aspects of culture analysis in general and stereotypes about other cultures and their functions in cross-cultural communication. It is suggested that miscommunication is subject to various norms and value systems that are not made explicit in communication, but which underlie linguistic behavior. Contextualization cues are found to play an important role, but their presence cannot be assumed in intercultural communication. Examples of the use of stereotypes in written business communication are shown from an advertisement campaign of the German Mercedes-Benz, which contains stereotypes about Finland. Contains 21 references. (LB)

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HOW TO AVOID ETHNOCENTRICITY AND STEREOTYPES IN ANALYZING ANOTHER CULTURE

Hartmut Schröder
University of Vaasa

At the most global level, the fate of all people, indeed the fate of the earth, depends upon negotiations among representatives of governments with different cultural assumptions and ways of communicating. (Tannen 1985, 203.)

Introduction

In the present paper, I suppose, it is not necessary either to mention that cultural differences are to be found within written business communication or to give any enlightening examples to demonstrate that these might cause painful misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.[1] Rather, I will deal with methodological problems caused by an *ethnocentric view* in analyzing another culture, and, in doing so, I would like to discuss some aspects of *culture analysis* in general (the first chapter of my paper). Furthermore, I will talk about the *stereotypes* about other cultures and their functions in cross-cultural communication (the second chapter of my paper). Last, but not least, I will present as an example of the use of stereotypes in written business communication some texts from an advertisement campaign of the German Mercedes-Benz, which contain stereotypes about Finland.

[1] According to the theoretical claim *commercial activity* is indeed rationally guided activity, "however in practice one very soon notices that even within a (relatively) homogenous culture other, often indeterminate factors come into play, which for the present can be described as interpersonal" (Beneke & Nothnagel 1988, 269). According to Paul Watzlawick, Beneke & Nothnagel assume that in the case of commercial activity, the *communication surrounding the object* goes hand in hand with the *communication surrounding the relationship*.

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The problem of ethnocentricity in analyzing another culture

The general problem in the social sciences, the *identity of subject and object in research*, arises in a particular way in cross-cultural research: here the scientist himself is always a member of a certain culture, so that the danger of ethnocentric misapprehensions is present. *Ethnocentricity in cross-cultural research* means that in describing and assessing foreign cultures the norms of one's own culture are taken to be absolutes, and the researcher "is no longer able to meet the challenge of understanding foreign cultures ... because of so many burdensome layers of categories" (Gries & Voigt 1989:171). Trommsdorf (1989a:776) observes from a sociological standpoint that "the familiar methodological and comparative problems of empirical science" become more acute in intercultural comparisons and a particular problem is observed in that "a procedure may well be valid in one culture, but not in another culture". Trommsdorf argues:

> Features that are identical in form can have different meanings in different cultures and features that are divergent in form can have the same meaning. Blind retranslations and the use of formally identical questions, scales and units of observation are therefore no solution for ensuring equivalence of indicators.

In cross-cultural research with a linguistic and foreign language teaching -orientation the methods of sociological *intercultural comparisons*[2] (as expounded by E. Durkheim) have so far received little or no attention. A methodological discussion is - it seems to me - in every respect unsatisfactory as it appears in the relevant publications of the new research field *intercultural communication*, so that much research "[...is] exposed to the constant danger of remaining anecdotal" (Beneke & Nothnagel 1988:270). Beneke and Nothnagel are right to point out that the results of cross-cultural research consist of mere "highlights", which in turn only attract attention when seen against the background of a

[2] There is a wealth of literature on intercultural comparison in sociology under the relevant entries in sociological dictionaries and in the articles in the anthology by Trommsdorf (1989b).

situation taken to the "normal" (1988:270). As regards "intercultural semiotics"[3] Beneke & Nothnagel are sceptical:

The very question of *what* should be semioticized and *how* is a question of specific cultures. The requirement for semiotics that are valid across cultures is difficult to fulfil. (1988:270.)

With that the theme of ethnocentricity in cross-cultural *research* has been addressed. Let me now, shortly, deal with some general methodological problems of culture analysis by referring to Raymonde Carroll's book *Cultural misunderstandings: the French-American experience*.

According to Carroll, "cultural misunderstandings can easily occur and can cause pain, because they are not recognized as cultural - as owing to differences in cultural presuppositions of which we are unaware" (p. xii). The concept of *culture* is understood by Carroll as "the logic by which I give order to the world" (p. 3); *"culture is a way of seeing the world, not a right of prior membership"* (p. 143).

From the point of view of cross-cultural communication I see the actual problem in the fact that the most important "part of this logic is tacit, invisible" (p. 3); this part "consists in the premises from which we constantly draw our conclusions. We are not conscious of these premises because they are, for us, verities. They are everything which 'goes without saying' for us and which is therefore transparent".

As soon as different cultures come into contact with each other it seems that certain conflicts simply cannot be avoided. This is because our 'natural' ways of seeing the world and our 'verities' do not coincide (p. 3). Furthermore, "since it is in the very nature of a verity to be self-evident and not to be challenged, I will not attribute the uneasiness or hurt I feel in a conflict situation to an erroneous interpretation on my part. Instead I will attribute this difficulty to one, or some, of the other's inherent characteristics" (pp. 3-4). In this fact we

[3] I do not see the starting point for cross-cultural research in linguistics but in *semiotics* as a general theory of linguistic *and* non-linguistic sign systems. From an intercultural viewpoint in particular, the inclusion of non-linguistic sign systems in oral as well as written communication is shown to be absolutely necessary.

have to see one important reason for the rise of *stereotypes* and *prejudices* about other cultures.

Concerning cultural prejudices and stereotypes I agree with Carroll (p. 4) in the following: "*if stereotypes are hardy, it is not because they contain a grain of truth but rather because they express and reflect the culture of those who espouse them.* Thus when I - a French person - say, 'American children are spoiled and impolite,' I am not expressing a basic truth but referring rather to the French conception of child raising, which I unconsciously learned to regard as truth, whereas it is merely my (French) truth."

The researcher who deals with cultural analysis must be aware of the cultural frame created by his own culture and language backgrounds if she or he wants to understand another culture with 'typical' characteristics. In the words of Carroll: "I must become aware of my own culture, of my cultural presuppositions, of the implicit premises that inform my interpretation, of my verities. Only after taking this step, which is in fact the most difficult one, can I begin to understand the cultural presuppositions of the other, the implicit premises which inform a formerly opaque text." (p. 4.) Furthermore, we have to take into account "(a) that my culture is not something external to me, I create it just as it creates me; it is no more outside me than my thoughts; it produces me and I produce it; (b) and that *cultural propositions*, the premises of which are invisible to me, *exist at such a level of abstraction as to allow for and include a very wide range of variations at the level of experience. In other words, two people can act in very different ways and at the same time reaffirm the same cultural proposition at the level of production of meaning.*" (p. 5.)

To sum up, I see *cultural analysis* - according to Carroll - "*as a means of perceiving as 'normal' things which initially seem 'bizarre' or 'strange'* among people of a culture different from one's own. To manage this, I must imagine a universe in which the 'shocking' act can take place and seem normal, can take on meaning without even being noticed. In other words, I must try to enter, for an instant, the cultural imagination of the other" (p. 2). Last but not least, let me point out that *cultural analysis* "*does not concern itself with value judgements*" (p.2); cultural analysis has to avoid any form of ethnocentricity.

How we can actually perform a cultural analysis? According to Carroll, we have to take into account the three following steps:

Firstly *I must "avoid all attempts at discovering the deep-seated reasons for the cultural specifity of such-and-such a group.* That is to say that I must avoid the temptation of psychological or psychoanalystic explanations ('because American mothers ...,' 'because French people can't stand authority ...;') I must also avoid the temptation of explanations that are ecological ('because the Xs lack protein'), geographical ('because they live in the thin mountain air'); meterological ('because of the abundance of rain'), or demographic ('because the opposition between city and country'). I must avoid the temptation of economic explanations ('because they are capitalists'), of religious explanations ('the French Catholics' 'the American Puritans'), of historical explanations (the role of invasions, wars), or even of sociological explanations ('the American family is such because people move around a lot'), and so on." (pp. 5-6.) This is because *the job of cultural analysis is not "to find out why things are as they are" (p. 6); rather, the job of cultural analysis is "to understand the system of communication by which meaning is produced and received within a group."* (p. 6.)

Secondly cultural analysis consists of listening to my own discourse and learning "to recognize the value judgments I include when I (sincerely) believe I am simply describing something" (p. 6). All this concerns my personal prejudices against a culture different from my own. If these prejudices are consciously going to be reflected as a result of my own cultural background it will be obvious to me that I have to do only with certain forms of ethnocentricity. In other words: The features I criticise in another culture are simply either the distance from my own culture or absence. "What I am saying, in fact, is that the Xs do not have 'my' sense of whatever it is." (p. 6) To avoide prejudices and stereotypes, "I must try to imagine a context in which this experience is no longer shocking or unpleasant, try to imagine a universe in which what was 'bizarre' becomes 'normal'" (p. 7).

Thirdly "cultural analysis consists of trying to discover, by analyzing other experiences, written texts ... or oral text ..., other domains in which the same cultural proposition seems to be confirmed, but in an apparently different fashion." (p. 9.)

Apart from these steps given by Carroll I perceive amongst other things the following possibilities for the avoidance of stereotypes and an ethnocentric viewpoint in cross-cultural analyses, which are only given briefly here and merely reflect experiences from project work:

First of all it is necessary to maintain an *interdisciplinary approach*. Since cross-cultural research is not about identifying language differences, but about differences in communication (which are only partially manifested in language) against the background of various systems of cultural values,[4] it is necessary to link up with *semiotics* as well as *sociology* and *anthropology*. The methods of the empirical social sciences (see above) and of field research in modern cultural anthropology[5] should be especially useful in this link-up. Furthermore, question formulations and methods from the *theory of literary reception* should give important impulses, in so far as the *effect* of texts can be included in cross-cultural research.

At the present time it *is not possible apprehend cultures in all their complexity*. Since the abstract overall communication of a certain society is subdivided horizontally into a seemingly inordinate number of relatively self-contained areas of communication, and furthermore within these areas there is, in turn, a marked vertical division according to the specific communication situation, a complete understanding of the communicative reality would seem to be excluded. Moreover, homogeneous cultures are in any case an abstraction, since in reality social, regional, national, ethnic, religious, political and other factors are present within a culture society and can possibly exert a greater influence on the communicative behaviour of the individual than the supposedly common culture. Finally, communicative behaviour is essentially an individual act so that generalizations are definitely ruled out.

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[4] By *cultural difference* I understand a difference in two cultures in their understandings and perceptions of what sort of communicative activity is expected of whom in certain situations. Cultural differences, therefore, are not to be found on the level of the different language systems, but concern the norms and conventions of activity through language and other means of communication.

[5] Cf., for example, the review of research strategies in cultural anthropology in Suojanen (1982) and of empirical methods of field research in Suojanen & Saressalo (1982).

Because of this complexity of the determinants of communicative behaviour, puported cultural differences (ie. established as such in empirical research) can only ever be seen as an *approximation to the communicative reality*; for that reason they are unsuited for judging, or even for making predictions about, other cultures. Descriptions of cultural differences are at their most meaningful when *small, selected and well isolated areas of communication* are researched, as for example in our project on company and product presentations. A generalization of research results from such a basis is, by their nature, excluded.

As long as cross-cultural research is carried out by people, it runs the general risk, when forming hypotheses, of basing arguments on *stereotypes* and/or, in categorizing, of creating stereotypes. In this connection it should be pointed out that it was through the more intensive examination of aspects of intercultural communication that new stereotypes were created and old ones gained a wider currency as well as a "scientific gloss". This is especially true - I think - for stereotypes about Finland and the Finns. *Research work in bicultural research groups* can offer a solution, although even this can easily lead to biased viewpoints due to the simple contrast of two cultures. Thus for instance the characterization of Finns as reticent is only valid in comparison with certain other cultures, but has no absolute validity. Therefore a *multilateral approach* would recommend itself, that is, the inclusion of many different cultures and cooperation between researchers from many different countries. In that way, particular categories of research such as *reticence* and *directness* could be further relativized and new viewpoints found as well as differentiating more accurately between individual cultures on a scale than if one hastily carries out a merely bilateral and thus almost always dichotomous contrast.

The use and functions of stereotypes in cross-cultural communication

Since stereotypes have a strong influence on comparitive cultural research as well as on intercultural communication itself, this concept will be analyzed in more depth in the following. The term *stereotype* originally comes from sociology, or social psychology, where it is taken to mean an ingrown impression which a social group has of itself *(autostereotype)* or of another social group *(heterostereotype)*. Often the term stereotype is linked with the term *prejudice*, by which it acquires a negative connotation. Since the development of

sociolinguistics the term has had an increasing presence in linguistics too, as documented in, for example, the fairly detailed *Bibliography on research on cultural prejudice and stereotypes* by Marianne Kranz (1987) with over 350 entries.

From a linguistic point of view, Bussmann (1983:504) understands by a stereotype a "term for describing mostly subconscious, deeply rooted judgements/prejudices that are specific to certain groups and emotionally charged"; in communication they generally offer an "aid to assessment", contribute to a mastery of the situation and fulfil a "relief function" in conflict situations. Thus the *functionality of the stereotype for its bearers* (ie. its *cognitive* and *social function*) can be further complimented by reference to its (often) self-fulfilling effect: *stereotypes (like rumours) create the reality from whose supposed existence they originate since they direct the social experiences of their bearers.*[6] Thus despite the lack of an empirical basis (ie. without actual verification) they constitute a *coherent world* which eases orientation and social behaviour even in new and unsure situations.

Evidently, stereotypes in intercultural communication present a particular problem area since here it is not only a question of communication between different social groups, but unfamiliar languages and cultures are also involved. Since verbal communication is mostly not *explicit* and *direct* - see for example Tannen (1985:205): "most communication is characterized by indirectness"[7] -

[6] This refers to the cognitive function of stereotypes. Cf. also the article by van Dijk (1983:382): "This means that concrete experiences with ethnic minorities are stored in models, but, at the same time, that people have more general scripts and attitudes about ethnic relations, which have a more schematic nature. ... Obviously, people without direct contacts with minority groups will tend to draw information from their grop schemata rather than from models, except for the models built on the information derived from personal communications and the mass media".

[7] From a philosophical point of view and related to the system of language, references are to be found to this also in Holenstein (1985: 167-170): "Unlike logical languages, natural languages are not systems rooted in explicit and constant arrangements of meaning. In them context, time and space also determine the meaning of the expression. Semantic flexibility takes precedence over unambiguity, contextual sensitivity over meaning independent of context. ... Natural language utterences are a mixture of redundancy and ellipses, of seemingly superflyous additions and unhesitating omissions. ... Situational connections are more important than systematical classifications and thanks to their variability they are also more stylistically appealing. In efficient

contextualization cues play an important role in getting the message through. The term contextualization cues, coined by Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1976), is understood by Tannen in the following - somewhat abbreviated - way: "*these signals indicate a metamessage about how the message ... is intended*" (1985:204). In a general article about *contextualization* Auer (1986:41) summarizes the "central idea" of this concept:

> In order to be able to interact quickly and harmoniously with one another, we must not only make 'meaningful' utterances, but also create contexts within which our utterances can be understood. Such contexts are schematic continuums of knowledge that attach to each other information of various types and in varying strength and thus ease assimilation and the production of linguistic and other acts by exposing redundancies.

Contextualization cues are now realized by means of *linguistic* as well as *non-linguistic means of textualization*, but - unlike language - are themselves not codified. As Auer says (1986:26):

> No contextualization cue has an 'inherent' meaning, which is hard and fast and determines its interpretations. Rather the individual contextualization cues are flexible, ie. they can be used for a number of functions. An unequivocal classification of contextualization cues as schemata is not possible.

Furthermore, as a result of much research (latterly Kotthof 1989) one can assume that contextualization cues are culture-bound and "thus lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping despite the redundancy already touched upon" (Auer 1986:27). That is to say that even the linguistically more or less competent (but foreign) non-native speaker does not or does not sufficiently know and recognize a) the contextualization cues of the destination language when communicating with a native speaker so that he inadequately interprets non-explicit linguistic behaviour by his communication partner and b) is inadequately interpreted by his communication partners in the foreign language by the use of contextualization cues from his own culture[8]. In both cases the result is that existing stereotypes about the alien person gain "confirmation"

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communication, knowledge is not only communicated, but also assumed."

[8] Kotthof (1989:24) also refers to this: "There are culture-typical and subtle hints for what schema and framing should be activated and what footing should be produced, since in principle the possibilities are many."

through social experiences, so that in this way stereotypes are reinforced, and/or through overgeneralization and simplification of the social experience with the alien person stereotypes are created which then become guiding in future communication. Here intercultural communication finds itself in a viscious circle, from which the only escape is on the *metacommunicative level*: ie. the rules of the communication must be negotiated and the content of the communication must be made as explicit as possible.

It should be stressed here that miscommunication is caused not only by language differences, but even more by culture differences which are usually manifested on the level of the *contextualization cues* and concern here primarily the non-linguistic contextualization cues. To that extent, I do not see the problem of address by the formal or informal "you" ("Sie" or "Du") in German-Finnish communicaton primarily as an expression of a cultural difference, rather as a linguistic problem which can hardly lead to damaging miscommunication in so far as competent communication partners can be assumed on either side (which is almost always the case in business communication). If, for example a Finn uses the informal "you" ("Du") with a German who only has a very limited knowledge of Finnish and has had contact with Finns, the German will hardly regard this as an affront, but will understand that a *faux pas* has occurred as a result of other linguistic customs - and that it moreover is easily put to rights (for example by consistent use of the formal "you" ["Sie"] thereafter).[9] Much more significant and intrusive, however, are the various (culture-bound) customs in *forms of address*; mentioning the forenames and surname (maybe even the title and other attributes) of the other, looking at the other person whilst addressing him, as well as other social niceties. Here culture differences are present as it is a question of differing cultural value systems: the frequent use of the name serves in some cultures as an expression of interest in the communication partner or of respect towards him; in other cultures it can token a certain intimacy; and in certain cultures the mention of a proper name can even be forbidden.[10] In written communication there are differing norms governing whether one may/should use the forename

[9] Addressing people with the formal and informal "you" ("Sie", "Du") is not necessarily an expression of differing cultural value systems since there are many other linguistic and non-linguistic substitutions for the polite form of address.

[10] Cf. eg. the report by Podder-Theising (1984) about "Hindus today".

(with or without surname) when addressing someone, whether one may/should abbreviate it or omit it completely[11], whether an explicit address is usual at the opening of a letter and whether substitute forms (eg. passive forms) may/should be used.[12]

Stereotypes in advertising

To conclude my article I would like to illustrate the use and function of stereotypes through examples of German-Finnish business communication, for which I shall first a) attempt a broadening of the term stereotype and b) relate the concept of the stereotype to written communication. By *broadening the term stereotype* I mean that the term here is not only employed in connection with attitudes and opinions towards social groups, but that attitudes and prejudices towards other countries and conditions are implied, in so far as these attitudes or prejudices have a generally collective character, are emotionally charged and overgeneralized and do not or only partially correspond to the facts. As regards *written communication*, I believe that stereotypes firstly manifest themselves in (written) texts and secondly that stereotypes towards other cultures can be

[11] Stolt (1988) comments: "The use of the forename is very different even in two so closely related language communities as German and Swedish. My example does not concern oral use in address, but signatures. In the 50's there was a professor in Uppsala who was known to the students by the nickname 'the professor with no forename'. He had taught in Greifswald for several terms and there he had acquired the convention of signing his announcements on the noticeboard with his surname only. When he retained this habit in Sweden he deviated from the local norm and therefore the expectations of the recipients. The surname alone without even initials is seen in Sweden as alienating or even curt. The reaction to any deviation from social norms is generally negative".

[12] There are many examples of cultural differences on this level in the German and Finnish company and product presentations, where the conventions of the native culture are generally carried over into translations.

created through (written) texts[13]. At the same time (written) texts are an important means for dispelling and dismantling stereotypes.

In my examples, which I would like to discuss briefly here, I refer to an advertising text in German by Mercedes-Benz about the "touring guarantee" of that car producer from the magazine *Der Spiegel* and to a Finnish text (in German) from the brochure *Kreativität als Rohstoff: Innovatives Finnland* (*Creativity as a raw material: innovative Finland*), which was issued in 1987 by the Finnish Foreign Trade Association in connection with an information campaign for the German-speaking market. The Mercedes-Benz text is a pure advertising text, the Foreign Trade Association's text comes from a lengthy brochure that is not aimed at the end consumer. Both texts are very similar in terms of the text-picture-relationship and the length of the text, and both texts express stereotypes about Finland.

As regards the Mercedes-Benz advertising text, it must first of all be seen as part of a total advertising campaign which extols the benefits of the new Mercedes-Benz "touring guarantee". The background to this campaign is the fear of a breakdown known to every motorist; as Mercedes-Benz puts it in an advertisement that appeared in *Der Spiegel* at the end of 1989 (No. 50/1989):

No motorist welcomes this: a breakdown somewhere *abroad* - perhaps *at night*... Even with a Mercedes such situations cannot be entirely ruled out. But should it happen - Mercedes drivers can be sure of help...

The key words are here: "somewhere *abroad*" and "perhaps at *night*" and (the slogan of the text) "We will keep you moving - even across *borders*". Apart from this advertisement there are other advertisements about the Mercedes-Benz

[13] Stereotypes can be created and/or reinforced by the intercultural reception of (written) texts. Carroll (p. 7) gives the following explanation for the existence of *cultural texts*: "Linguistic difficulties aside, I am faced with a cultural text when I get a 'strange' feeling upon being confronted with an opacity that I cannot dissipate without falling back on the explanation 'the Xs are...' which as we have seen, is anything but an explanation." In my opinion *cultural texts* include in particular those text types which do not exist in all cultures, eg. *marriage wishes* in German (cf. James 1980:117) *telephone messages* and *shopping lists* in German (Glück 1988:38) as well as text types for which there are pronounced linguistic and cultural conventions (eg. death announcements, job applications, curricula vitae etc.).

touring guarantee which also refer to breakdown assistance abroad, but which I shall not go into further here. Rather I would like to discuss an advertisement (*Der Spiegel* No. 12/1990), in which Finland (or stereotypes about Finland) is used as a demonstration of the benefits of the touring guarantee. In that advertisement Finland is presented as the embodiment of *foreign*, *winter*, and *border* and (at least in the case of a breakdown) of *frightening*. The initial (threatening) situation is eased, however, and the fear of the Mercedes driver is removed by the touring guarantee; for "*Even* Leppävirta is only one hour away from Stuttgart".[14]

The Mercedes-Benz advertisement functions in the German market because of the stereotyped impression of Finland. Stereotypes in this advertisement are to be found in the picture as well as in the text and in the combined effect of the two.

The large landscape *photograph* conveys a stereotype impression of Finland, where the elements are restricted to *snow*, *lakes*, *forest* and the *horizon*, against which only the stationary Mercedes stands out, and moreover it appears to have come to a halt on a *snowed-up* road. There is a (faint) hint of dusk and the headlight[15] on the Mercedes also give the impression that it is fairly *dark*, and dusk can be seen as a symbol of the Finnish *winter gloom*. Through the choice of elements moreover the picture gives the impression of *icy cold*. Since other than the red colour of the Mercedes and the red tone of dusk the only colours are blue and white, the Finnish *national colours* are brought into play, which ought to be familiar to the reader of the advertisement from the Finnish flag (and hint at Finnish patriotism).

All in all the picture presents on the one hand an impression of a magical but almost unreal and bewitched fairytale world, and on the other hand fear is

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[14] The "even" in the title of this advertisement could - with reference to the already quoted Mercedes advertising for the "touring guarantee" be replaced by "even if" - in any case it fulfils the same function as "even if". The stereotype manifested here is very similar in character to "He is an American, but he behaves himself very well."

[15] Unlike Finland, in Germany lights do not have to be on when driving on the open road, only at night, in rain and in bad visibility. Thus the car's headlight is for the German reader a sign of darkness or dusk.

Auch Leppävirta ist nur eine Stunde von Stuttgart entfernt.

Figure 1. The Mercedes-Benz advertisement about the new touring guarantee (*Der Spiegel* 12, 1990)

conveyed by the expanse and simultaneous emptiness combined with cold and darkness.

The *text* of the advertisement accompanies and completes the stereotype impressions created by the picture and organizes them into certain patterns. The locations Leppävirta and Japilla[16] and other proper names - *Marti Huotari*[17], *Seppo Lapp*[18] and *Matti Sauni Oy* - alert the reader to the fact that the scene is Finland through the many vowels, the A-umlauts, the typical diphthongs, the double consonants, the surname Lapp and the forename Matti (known as a Finnish forename because of the ski jumper Matti Nykanen).

As early as the first sentence we are told that this is Middle Finland; the plot, then, does not take place in Helsinki (which as a metropole would not be exotic enough) and not in Lapland either (which would be too exotic) but in Middle Finland, presumably a place somewhere between civilization and wilderness. And in a place like that a motorist needs help! For the ensuing arguments it can now be taken as read that the average motorist is intimated by this prospect; for only the Mercedes driver with the new "touring guarantee" need have no fear, since even in this extreme situation he can call for help: "Even Leppävirta is only an hour away from Stuttgart".

The stage is then complimented by further stereotype impressions of Finland and her inhabitants: naturally there is a *wooden house* at the entrance to Leppävirta which naturally has *two floors*; the *landlord* of the *Pikabaari* (ie. the snack bar[19]) is naturally very *friendly*: the Mercedes driver is "very welcome to

[16] The places are authentic; Jappila however is spelt incorrectly (with double 'l' and without double 'p'). Leppävirta is mentioned in travel guides on account of its church, which dates from the last century. And even though Leppavirta is only a little village 250 km north of Helsinki, it is relatively well known to German visitors to Finland, for the Finnish national instrument 'kantele' is built there.

[17] The forename Marti should be written with double 't'.

[18] The surname Lapp is rather unlikely and is more probably a concession to German readers.

[19] The translation of 'Pikabaari' as 'Wirtshaus' ('snack bar') seems to me to be just as inappropriate as having a 'Wirt' ('landlord') in a snack bar. At any rate, the word 'Wirt' has a positive connotation in German, which is important

make a telephone call". It is also worth noting that the landlord's name somehow sounds endearing when pronounced the typical German way [hu:otári].

The same goes for the proper name Soini [zo:íni] and for Matti, Seppo and Lapp, which sound pathetic in German ears. Apart from the landlord there is only one other Finnish actor in the short scene, a *reliable* and *efficient* garage owner[20] who ignores both wind and weather to get Mercedes drivers out of trouble.

Although the Mercedes advert only makes positive comments on the Finns and even if the picture conveyed of Finland is not necessarily disparaging, overgeneralizations and simplifications are made which do not necessarily correspond to the Finns' picture of themselves, but which are very functional in connection with the advertisement: the backdrop of a winter landscape in Middle Finland[21] suits the purposes of the advertisement very well, and the tension is pierced by the friendly and reliable Finnish people, who are also portrayed as somewhat exotic if not pathetic.

Such stereotypes about Finland (used or created in the Mercedes advertisement)[22] can be extremely annoying to the Finns, which is shown, for example, by an extract from an information brochure "Innovatives Finnland"

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for the advertisement.

[20] That a 'Werkstattleiter' ('garage *owner*') attends to the stricken Mercedes seems to me very unlikely - when thinking of the social structures in Finnish Mercedes dealerships. But garage *owner* again has a commendatory connotation and is more appropriate here than just 'mechanic' or 'breakdown truck'.

[21] On the other hand a summer landscape in Middle Finland would not be suited to the intention of this advertisement.

[22] I do not want to explore any further here whether advertisements (in this case the German Mercedes advertisement) *use* stereotypes or *create* them. Furthermore I will not explore whether the stereotypes in the text of the Finnish Foreign Trade Association are *autostereotypes* or *heterostereotypes*. Both questions shall remain unanswered here as the necessary background information is not available and the intention here is only to show *how stereotypes* about one's own or another country *can be functionalized* for one's own purposes.

published by the Finnish Foreign Trade Association[23], to which I will refer in the following. I refer to the first two inside pages of the brochure, which contains one large picture and a text which introduces the whole brochure.

The *photograph* shown is very similar to the one in the Mercedes advertisement, although apparently it depicts not Middle Finland but North Finland or Lapland (at least that is suggested by the hills in the background). On the level of the photograph therefore the assumed *heterostereotypes* of the Germans are

Figure 2. The information brochure "Innovatives Finnland" by the Finnish Foreign Trade Association.

[23] The importance of the perception of Finland abroad to Finnish industry and commerce is underlined by the fact that in 1987 the Finnish ministry of trade and industry put together a working group to research people's concept of Finland and to strengthen it in the principal export markets. In a report the working group begins from the following ideal of Finland:
"- a nordic democracy succesfully carrying out a policy of neutrality
- a modern welfare state with a well developed high-tech economy
- a country with a creative and distinctive culture
- a country with unspoilt nature" (von Hertzen 1989:160).
That this ideal of Finland still needs to be cultivated abroad is shown for example by the result of the *TIME Survey on Trade and the Future of Europe*, in which amongst other things attitudes to countries' products are examined. Here are some results which clearly show how different the impressions of Finland are in Finland and abroad: *modern, up-to-date*: Finland 88%, abroad 51%; *technologically advanced*: Finland 76%, abroad 25% *innovative:* Finland 50%, abroad 21%.

picked up, and are then gone into further on the text level. In this connection the key words in the *text* are: *north of the Arctic Circle, winter lasts for two thirds of the year, forest, lakes, moor, language, no particular natural resources.* Admittedly these are facts; the mere listing of these facts whilst omitting other facts is the (empirical) basis for the familiar stereotypes about Finland and the Finns. Of course in the text in question the listing of the facts which lead to the stereotype impressions is followed by the all-important prodding: the listing of facts only served to make the reader aware of the underlying bias, in order now to tell him the "whole truth" about Finland. This other side of Finland is brought out in the second half of the text with key words such as *one of the wealthiest and most technical advanced countries in the world, creativity* and *resourcefulness* and finally *small, but innovative.*

Although this argumentation makes use of *autostereotypes*, the extract seems to me nonetheless to be a good example of how *heterostereotypes* in intercultural communication can be breached by written text.

Conclusion

Beginning with methodological problems of cross-cultural research, general aspects of culture analysis were discussed, with reference to Carroll. In the process it appeared that miscommunication is subject to various norms and value systems that are not made explicit in communication, but which underlie linguistic behaviour although they are not codified in grammar. In this connection *contextualizations cues* play an important role; a knowledge of and compliance with which are an important precondition for the success of communication. In intercultural communication, however, the existence of common *contextualizations cues* cannot be assumed; rather the parties involved seem to be governed by the *contextualization cues* of their own culture, thereby producing the empirical basis for *stereotypes* about the other party. Finally a sort of vicious circle can occur in intercultural communication which can only be breached on the metacommunicative level.

The problem of *ethnocentricity* in intercultural communication was analyzed in more detail, and ways and methods of avoiding an ethnocentric vision in research were presented. The concept of the stereotype was problematized not

only for the research process, but described in its functionality for the process of intercultural communication itself. With a view to written communication a broadening of the term was attempted. Furthermore, it was demonstrated with an example from German-Finnish business communication how stereotypes function and how - if they are explicitly taken up - can potentially be breached. The brief analysis of the two sample texts showed that stereotypes in written texts are not realized via explicit linguistic textual means, but that they can only be revealed by a *culture-semiotic* approach.

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